

A+ AUTHENTIC, ACCESSIBLE ACADEMIC LANGUAGE BOOKS

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Many books these days offer ideas for teachers working with English language learners to help learners improve their academic language. I read a lot of these books, and with each new one, I wonder if the author has authentic experience with ELLs and if the author's ideas are presented in a teacher-friendly way. Since I know ESL teachers are eager for great techniques for teaching academic language and are always pressed for time, I offer here my A+ list of authentic, accessible books.

Building Academic Language: Essential Practices for Content Classrooms (Jossey-Bass, 2008).

The work of author Jeff Zwiers has received a lot of attention recently, and deservedly so. This book is highly readable and packed with practical ideas for building students' academic language skills and the higher-order thinking skills that are linked with academic language. The specific activities and practices are based on Jeff's own teaching and many hours of detailed classroom observation for his dissertation (Yeah, I read that too, to check his authenticity.) This is a book that you can dip into any place for ideas both for yourself and content classroom teacher colleagues. Excerpts of this book are available at <http://www.jeffzwiers.com/BAL.html>, and many of the materials mentioned in it can be obtained at <http://www.jeffzwiers.com/resources.html>.

Exploring How Texts Work (Primary English Teaching Association, 1991).

After an opening chapter describing the language approach used, this book has six chapters, each of which features a particular genre such as explanation or recount. You could easily read one slim chapter a night, but then you'd lie awake all night thinking about implementing all the great ideas in your own classroom. In each chapter, author Beverly Derewianka sketches an authentic teaching unit in use, focuses on one activity to demonstrate how the teacher develops students' language awareness, and describes typical language features found in the genre.

Exploring How Texts Work is published by the Primary English Teaching Association Australia (PETAA), which provides a number of resources including full teaching units submitted by member teachers at <http://www.petaa.edu.au/resources.aspx>.

Reading in Secondary Content Areas: A Language-Based Pedagogy (University of Michigan Press, 2008).

Basing their teaching ideas on the concepts of functional language introduced in an initial chapter, authors Zhihui Fang and Mary Schleppegrell provide an illuminating analysis of typical texts in history, science, math, and language arts. This book requires more processing time than the previous two (you can't just dip in here and there to pick up ideas), but with a study guide in the back, this book would be perfect for a school-based study group to share and apply. The authors use actual texts such as a geometry problem and a sonnet by Edna St. Vincent Millay as concrete, authentic examples to analyze. You can look inside this book at www.press.umich.edu/esl/.

In addition to readability and practicality, what these books have in common is a view of language as a resource for making meaning. The authors demonstrate how each academic subject uses that resource in its own way and offer new tools for enabling learners to participate effectively, deeply, and meaningfully in activities using the language of school. Although the books are intended for K-12 teachers, many of the authors' ideas are adaptable for a range of proficiency levels and ages (but if you know of a book that specifically targets academic language for GED students, let me know so I can add it to my reading list.)